

JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY CINEMA

EDITORS

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Dear Sisters:

Enclosed you'll find a transcript of a discussion on pornography among about 25 women at the Conference on Feminist Film Criticism here. My purpose in sending this to you (and your friends, if you'll pass it along) is to elicit written responses from a broad spectrum of women. We expect to publish a series of materials in JUMP CUT on pornography, and my own aim is to start a discussion from a feminist perspective both in JUMP CUT and in the women's film community about pornography. Right now I am particularly concerned to hear a lot of women's voices--their different experiences, views and emphases. That seems to me to be the essential first step, the necessary starting point for such a project.

The enclosed discussion, which took place at Northwestern University November 16, 1980, was transcribed to remove identificatory information and condensed and edited for readability. I plan to prepare a more polished version of this discussion for publication, along with reprinting sections of articles on pornography that have appeared in the feminist press, plus your responses to this.

What I would like from you now is a written response to the issues raised in this preliminary discussion about women and pornography. If you were a participant, maybe you would like to expand on your ideas. If you have any analyses, bibliographic references, related personal experiences, maybe you would like to write those up. I would only incorporate into the article material that came in signed (to prevent crank responses), but your response or sections of it could be published anonymously, or you just might like to share your ideas with me. Collective responses--in united or diverse voices--would be great.

As an editor of a film publication and as a feminist critic, I myself put off a serious consideration of pornographic film for a long time (till I was over 40!) but now think considering this issue can teach us many things about women's relation to the mass media. You may not be interested in the subject at all as an area for feminist intellectual pursuit. In any case, please circulate this among your friends. I'd like responses from women of all ages and in any area of work. Please identify a little of your background so readers can know where you're coming from. I'm going to write up the final version of this article in February; try to respond before then. Since the problem of pornography will not go away soon, later responses would be welcome whenever they come in.

In solidarity,

Julia Lesage

Julia Lesage

Discussion of Women and Pornography, Conference on Feminist Film
Criticism, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, November 16, 1980

Transcribed by Julia Lesage

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT OUR INVOLVEMENT WITH THE ISSUE IS
(paragraph changes with each change of speaker)

I'm interested in fantasy and pornography for a number of reasons. First of all, I have an acute sado-masochistic fantasy life, which is one of the things the women's movement hasn't helped me with. Not quite, because within the context of our own women's group, we've done a lot of discussion about the role of sado-masochistic fantasies within heterosexual women's sex life. About two years ago someone really lambasted me about how could I teach American film and not have ever seen a pornography film? So I went, very stoned, with my lover, a man, to a "clean" theater couples often go to. It was thrillingly forbidden, so I could get into it a little. Since then, I've seen two other porn films, which are very interesting to me, but they've become progressively less attractive to me sexually, because they seem the same. On the other hand, I don't find them as threatening as I find any kind of thriller or murder film, in which the violence is artistically built in. That's as far as I've been able to get in my own explorations of pornography. I don't know what's going on in the porn films themselves. I'm curious about that: I'm curious about it in its relation to my fantasy life; I'm curious about it in its relation to more widely seen kinds of films, the murderous film in which violence against women is presented in an intense montage sequence or build up of tension. I don't find that build up of tension in a pornography film. Also, I'm very suspicious of discussions of pornography where critics don't talk about their own hormonal involvement. That can be anger, attraction, or any combination of both. I'm concerned to discuss ^{these} issues as a feminist because ^{other} discussions haven't been of enough complexity to help me, and presumably not of enough complexity to help other women.

I'm interested in women in pornography-erotica because I'm having problems dealing not with my own sexuality but by own turn-on regarding erotica-pornography. And being a feminist, how to admit that I enjoy looking at Playboys (they're pretty air-brushed). I feel, "Gee, I like it, but I'm a feminist." There's a big scare there that I don't know how to deal with. It's like the sexuality is erased out of being a feminist, that it's just all political. But I'm a sexual person, and that's the way it is. So I'm having problems dealing with achieving a balance, and with feeling guilty about the turn-on.

I went into an introductory women's studies class that I had to take after I had had a couple of years of it and did a presentation on pornography. It was purposely manipulative in that I showed a small silent film like the ones in the little coin-operated boxes in the porno stores. I did it with another woman and our intention was to present to the class--it was all women in the class--actually what you could find in terms of pornography. Ever since then, I've lost that nervous tension of confronting it. Our discussions about it never seem to consider what it does, how it operates socially, what's going on there. My own reaction to it is minimal. There are certain one-shot frames that may be appealing, but the majority of it isn't. I want to discuss it and its functions and what it's doing.

I have mixed feelings about the feminist position on pornography. When (someone) found out that I was going (to the conference in San Francisco), she started twisting my arm to present a paper. I said, "I don't know anything about pornography, that's why I'm going to the conference." She said, "Yes, but you know how to do a feminist analysis." So a student and I did an analysis of the research that attempts to show--and it's incorporated in all the sex education books--how pornography is either beneficial or harmless. We were outraged at how terrible that research is and how since it's been incorporated, everybody mindlessly goes around saying, "The Danish experiments proved that..." Then I got angry about the pro-pornography lobby. Still, I used to have sado-masochistic fantasies and got turned on reading The Story of O, so I had ambivalent feelings. Most upsetting was the interview with Linda Lovelace in Ms. Magazine. For those of you who don't know, I've been researching women who were raped and women who avoided being raped, and those stories are sort of seared into my soul, and I identify very heavily with them. And reading Lovelace's story I knew I couldn't enjoy it (porn) from now on, because I would always wonder if that actress was essentially being held captive; that would block out anything else I might feel. And "On All Things Considered"--the nice, liberal, intellectual program--there was this interview with Linda Lovelace's successor and her producer. The (Ms.) article had ended by saying how the New York Times interviewer interviewed the two of them and this woman (Marilyn Chambers) asked permission to go to the bathroom and the boss said, "No, not now." It's all I could think of during the whole TV interview. I thought, "Why doesn't she ask Chambers about that?" I feel identification with the possible victimization of the woman, so I don't have those ambivalences any more.

I recently did a bibliographic project dealing with pornography and some research on pornography. What I'm interested in now is the next step for my paper. Fantasies going on in pornography seem similar to the kinds of things I was doing with smut. It's on a continuum. I'm interested in the relationship between humor and satire and pornography and what the link is there, as aggression against women. Looking at pornography--oh, something not very violent, like THE DEVIL AND MISS JONES--generally (before I began to think about pornography) was kind of like pabulum. There are so many films with manipulative violence against women that I've found more threatening and horrifying. What's going on in pornography that's so upsetting? I find a film like DRESSED TO KILL more upsetting than an average pornographic film without violence. I'm not talking about the extreme snuff films, or bondage films, or that kind of thing, but I find something like DRESSED TO KILL that glorifies women's rape fantasies more repulsive than a film that might objectify women. It might manipulate their sexuality or use them as a commodity, but so does the average television commercial. I look at it in that context. I have trouble dealing with that issue--the difference between violence and women as commodity and this more whitewashed Playboy kind of sexuality where it's not heavy bondage or anything like that. Even though it's more frequent even in less hard-core material like Playboy that you do have all these bondage fantasies surfacing now, and that upsets me. But I'm still puzzled and worried about that issue, and also I'm worried about the idea of censorship and how you deal with this.

I had ambivalent feelings about pornography. I was looking at it in terms of being a librarian, and as a writer against censorship. For the past couple of years I no longer see fighting pornography as censorship; I see it as defending myself as a woman and defending us against the demeaning of women. I see pornography in terms of harm done to women and am intolerant of it now. I can enjoy the beauty of a female human body, and certainly there should be a place for erotica. Something to do just with the human body would not be pornographic at all. But when it demeans women by showing them in bondage or mutilating their bodies or showing violence against them, to me that would be pornographic and harmful.

My former ambivalent feelings about pornography also pretty much focused on my concern for the image of women and particularly how children are exploited in pornography. I'm doing research on sex role stereotypes and androgyny and clinical judgments of mental health, and I'm interested in how women are depicted and the image of women in all different areas of life. I'm here to heighten my own awareness about pornography in all aspects so I can be more instrumental in sharing that with clients or students.

I don't have a whole lot of ambivalence about pornography. It doesn't turn me on, although THE DEVIL AND MISS JONES certainly did, but most of it doesn't turn me on at all. What disturbs me more about the pornography movement is that a whole lot of energy has gone into showing us how it is that men have taken away pleasure from us. That's really clear, and it's important that we keep saying that this is not what women really are. But we're 10, 15 years into the women's movement and still we're not talking about our own sexuality, and that disturbs me a lot. I feel like we talk negatively about what we are not, sexually. We know we are not those women in Playboy, but what are we sexually? The questions about what we are sexually are silenced by what often feels like a very strident tone saying that violence is bad in sex. I happen to think it's not true. And that tone disturbs me more than anything else. I'm not here to clarify what pornography is. We know it's bad, but I have questions that take that one step beyond: What is our sexuality, then? We know we're all formed by this culture, so it's certainly true that some of that pornography, some of those images probably do move us in the same way. How do we work from that to knowing who we are sexually?

I've worked for a couple of years now with a group, a direct action group, that is an anti-pornography--feminist, anti-pornography--group. Right now I'm part of a study group, and we've discussed or are about to discuss every single issue that everyone's talking about. I think a particular idea being discussed by other feminists that interests me is the idea of power and consent. In the male-dominated, heterosexually-enforced heterosexual culture, consent has been what's been used to discriminate between "normal sexual behavior," whether it be between men and women or women and women, as lesbians care to look at it, and rape or abuse of power. I'm curious about examining that whole idea.

We're sexed to death. They put us and our sex everywhere, and I'm tired of it. It would be nice to be able to be in a situation where we might be free to discover what that might mean for us personally. But it might also be nice to find out it doesn't mean a whole lot. I suspect maybe it is that simple, but this culture's invested in sex so much that it's almost impossible to be that free. But it's a goal.

If we were to set our own priorities, maybe first we should expend our energies in dealing with our own sexuality.

But we are not the ones that are determining what's happening in this society. I think there's a crisis in society and so we can't say that we're going to deal with our own sexuality. Since '68 or whenever you want to mark as the beginning of the women's movement until today, the proliferation of pornography has become so extensive that we cannot choose not to deal with that, because it's at a destructive level. What I find horrifying is that when pornography was contained to mean pornographic films that were shown in sleazy-type cinemas, it was one thing. But now that kind of violence has completely been absorbed into mainstream cinema in things like the DePalma film--we can all name them--or the new Godard film. So it's art cinema and it's commercial

Hollywood cinema, it's Vogue magazine, and the next thing it's going to be on prime time television. And that's frightening because then it's no longer treated as something that's set apart from us, and for dirty old men. It's the type of photographs that they used in LAURA MARS, that kind of a depiction. It's already being taken into society and we see it on record covers and Montgomery Wards windows. We don't have a choice not to deal with it and to deal with something else. It must be dealt with.

I agree with (the last speaker). I've been involved with questioning pornography ever since I was studying photography and there was a show of work by Les Krims there. He's a good example of pornography making its way in the fine arts. At the time I was deeply disturbed by what I saw. Obviously, we're all disturbed by violent pornographic images, without question. But I couldn't explain it to all these people around me who said, "You can't talk about this that way, because it's not the same thing." I spent a lot of time looking at that, thinking about it, and talking to a lot of women, and finally began to realize that, yes, it is the same thing, that the separations more or less are artificial. I still have some questions about what people label pornography and what's going on in photography and film. Photography was the place where it surfaced very clearly a number of years ago. (How did this affect your own photographing of women?) I started doing video. It made me very conscious of (depicting women's bodies). The only tape I've done--it's a finished piece that I show a lot--is about fighting pornography. It's all connected; there I did show several of the male images that I feel are the kinds of images we're talking about. The tape shows all women talking, mostly talking, about one's own personal response to pornography, and then the questions about what to do, how that response is translated into some kind of political involvement, some kind of direct action. I got involved in direct action against pornography and against the film SNUFF specifically, and went to court, and have been dealing with this issue for some few years now. I came here because I can't avoid conversations about pornography. But I do have questions that I specifically bring here, and that is to consider x-rated films. I've seen a few for my own research. It's important to look at this thing to understand it. Those films function in a certain way I'm not clear about. How does the image function--both for men and for women? It's important to consider the image and not just dismiss it as if we all knew what we're talking about. Because I don't think we all know what we're talking about at all. Pornography is infused in other things. My reason in looking at pornography is not to separate it out at all. The images are everywhere, and I've done a slide show that deals with that.

For the past year, I've been working actively with Woman Against Pornography in New York, something I feel strongly about. We have a slide show that I take around to a lot of college campuses and other women's groups. So I do a lot of public speaking about pornography. I also take women, and sometimes men, on tours of the Times Square pornography district in New York, so I have to confront it at least once a month directly. Since the rise of the women's movement, pornography has become much more vicious and violent and much more pervasive in the last 15 years, since the beginning of the second wave of feminism. There's a strong connection there because if you look at a lot of pornography you find that often there's this element of striking back at women. A lot of pornography deals with women's libbers. For example, Screw Magazine a year ago, just before Women Against Pornography held its march in Times Square, was all about Women Against Pornography. A story, "Feminist Sex Secrets" was about how liberated ladies could bust balls. And it had a picture of this castration kit; castration devices were named after feminists. One of them was named after Susan Brownmiller, who was one of the founders of our organization. Interestingly, one of them was named after Betty Dodson, who wrote the book Liberating Masturbation; as far as I know she has had

no connection with the anti-pornography movement. Just the idea that she was celebrating women's sexuality without men was threatening, and so she became an appropriate person to attack.

I began my writing career reviewing porno movies. Over ten years ago, I thought it good for women to express publically the fact that we are sexual beings, that we can respond to sexual images of whatever sort. I quickly came to the conclusion that the kind of x-rated movies that were being made--this was in the age of porno chic, which has been long gone--made me uncomfortable both about the objectification of women and the sado-masochistic portrayal. I became more interested in erotic movies made by women and the kind of different sorts of erotic experience that can be envisioned by women, both heterosexual, lesbian and auto-eroticism.

I have a tendency to think of pornography simply as a continuum, as part of the whole system of image-making in cinema and in other places. It is a kind of a place of crystalization of many of the things we're already aware of, but a way of enhancing those things and presenting them in a very kind of visceral fashion. It's remarkable how pornography and other films as well can portray the "liberated woman" in such a way as to recuperate that image within the system. I've seen some films in which that happens, and so that impresses even more on me that it's all part of a continuum.

I'm a writer, and I'm naive on this subject and would like to become more so.

What is the effect of pornography on us as women spectators? Because we're all very familiar with the kind of approach that you're taking of making people aware of the pervasiveness of it, what other things could be said from our point of view?

What is around that I can recuperate for my own pleasure, or else can I create something? I'm much less interested in destroying male pleasure than I am interested in trying to create something that will enhance my own pleasure and hopefully that of other feminists.

A couple of levels--both the personal and the scholarly--come together in my teaching, as I deal with my students and their reactions to the new wave of pornography in the cinema that is on an acceptable aesthetic level for them. I have to deal with papers about HALLOWEEN or talk about DRESSED TO KILL, with going to these films myself, critiquing them for the students, and discussing them with the students, sometimes on a personal level. But also I think in my own academic discourse with other scholars, I would like to talk about the way in which violence is used as an aesthetic tool; that there are filmmakers who are established and who are seen as using violence--violence against men, violence against women--as a way of making a statement. How do we separate out for ourselves what they're doing--what they're doing against women as opposed to what they're doing in terms of violence against others or in images in a total sense?

DISCUSSION OF THE QUESTION: HOW DOES PORNOGRAPHY AFFECT US AS WOMEN?

I'm having problems with my own sexuality and, being a feminist, admitting that I am turned on. Erotica and pornography, there's such a fine line, it's real hazy. How to define that? How to admit to myself that I am both turned on and a feminist? And it's something that I've been feeling guilty about, of being turned on physically. Pornography is wrong, but I'm a sexual person.

If you trace all the possible positions you can take toward pornography, at one time only men enjoyed it, so women said, "We want to enjoy it too." Then we ask, "What is this that we're enjoying--who's made this, whose fantasy is it?" One thing remarkable about pornography that makes me want to reject it in terms of pleasurable viewing or identification is the profound emphasis on genital sexuality and all the connotations that has in terms of heterosexuality, in terms of the way sexuality has been posed through heterosexuality. That's completely disregarding distribution, expectations and all the other kinds of circuitry of pornography. So just on that basis I would not want to think that pleasure is a value in that situation.

I am particularly interested in hearing what some of the people here who are lesbians might have to say about this because one of the problems that I have in terms of this focus on heterosexuality, and genital intercourse as defining sexuality, is that to me it's difficult for those kind of portrayals to get away from dominance-submission patterns. Or else sometimes you'll get a reversal and you'll have the woman dominating the male. There seems to be this constant power struggle. And one of the things that might be liberating about the sharing of lesbian experiences is that this might offer a different kind of model.

One of the definitions of pornography focuses on this power differential. Work that is erotic and does not depict power differentials has been done by Tee Corinne, who did the famous "Sinister Wisdom" poster. And I've seen her new book, which is not out yet, and her slide show. In that there is certainly explicit sexuality; some of it is a turn-on and some of it isn't, but I don't find it offensive because there is no power differential. Even more striking, even though Judy Chicago is not a lesbian she's heavily woman-identified. I remember looking at the Emily Dickinson plate in her studio and contracting. There was certainly no violence and no power and no s. and m. So one can look at the work of Barbara Hammer or the work of Tee Corinne or the Dinner Party as examples of erotica that we would not be opposed to.

Is the whole issue, Who's making it?, Whose images and whose fantasy is it? When we were talking about Hollywood cinema, it's who was directing it, who wrote it? The question of alternatives--Tee Corinne, Judy Chicago, the question of alternatives in the film conference, the movies we were looking at this morning, the movies we're going to be talking about this afternoon. What I'm wondering is, What is it about pornography...about that sex in it, which is making people's reactions to it so different? I don't think anyone would call for censorship of film. Not that everybody calls for censorship of all pornography, but that is an issue--censorship of pornography. Yet pornography is film, and it ties into the issue of sex--sexuality, women's sexuality, and all this kind of thing. Sex is being dealt with in this film medium, and how does that change the questions about film? How does that change the questions about sex? That's just a thought.

I find the notion of pornography appealing. I'd like a place where I could go to, a movie I could watch specifically for a turn-on. I would do it specifically for a sexual rush which might or might not lead to sex with somebody else; I might want to masturbate in the movie. There's no movie theater I can do that in. But I like the idea. Also I'd like seeing specific genital or whatever naked activity to be a possibility for me. That the culture has, in fact, institutionalized it as a possibility for men in a sense is liberating, in letting me know that such an institution could be culturally created. After all, if I'd lived in the Puritan era, I wouldn't have thought such a cultural institution possible. The fact that I know about such a cultural institution makes me want something like that for myself.

Since I'm in film I think film might be able to do it. And yet when I look at these movies, one of the things I see, of course, are millions of penises. That's the first thing that seems totally dumb. The pornography movie is a little like a soap opera; it has millions of small episodes. One of the small episodes might be something you could get into. But any small episode I could really get involved in maybe started out engagingly, and then the woman in the episode had to deal with three or four penises, which of course removed my fascination from whatever was going on. But I have this sense that I see the vision of an institution that I find immensely appealing. I refuse to say, "I don't want an institution that focuses on genital sexuality." I'd like a place that I could just go and come, maybe several times. Or, if I didn't come right away I could go home and think about it and come. That's been established as a right for men in our culture. I want the right.

I think we all live in history, and I was raised in a very repressed Victorian background. It's through a sado-masochistic lesbian relation that I've been encouraged to get in touch with my sexuality. I think that that's not about picking up what heterosexual formulas have shown you, but that there may be something which doesn't have to do with heterosexual power relationships that can be pleasurable. I don't know what that is and don't have a clear sense of it yet. It's good for us to know what's going on in all of our respective minds and desires. This is something that I've recently found to be a very real, positive turn-on. I think it's very important for me to see it as entirely separate from heterosexual s. and m., which I can't imagine seeing as a turn-on.

Is there a difference for people in their responses between literature and film? Is there a difference in your response to reading erotic literature? Because I find a great difference between my own creation of those words and that fantasy experience, which I can get pleasurable experience from, and seeing an explicit image on the screen, which does not turn me on. And I don't know if it's generational because I was raised on literature as pleasurable. Pornographic cinema was not even an option when I was growing up in a small town in Illinois; we didn't have a porno theater. Stag films were exclusively a male institution; an exclusively male party, in fact, meant women were never even allowed to think about porn. My turn-ons came from literature, starting from the classics but going on from there.

Imagination is always better than the movie.

Maybe if I would read The Story of O now I wouldn't like it, but at the time it was a turn-on. When I saw the comic strip version of it, I felt physically battered and slapped in the face. I sort of cringe more when I see than when I read pornography, because I can construct more of it when I read it and have more control over it. So I think the media does make a difference, but again it may be a generation thing.

It's more than just imagination's being better than what you see. Literature allows you to imagine yourself as perhaps participant, whereas on film you immediately become the voyeur. And that's perhaps not a position which women are brought up to be comfortable in, that kind of active looking at such performances. I have the same reaction that you do, of being made uncomfortable.

Do you feel then that men in our culture really are brought up to be turned on by voyeurism? I don't think the way men respond and the way we do are at all separable issues.

What implications are there of being turned on by material that places women in a subordinate, submissive position? (WAV in New York) have this slide show that shows you the most violent, horrible, disgusting images. And so you go out terrified.

In fact, the actual material you find is not like that (it must be in more hidden magazines). What is actually available in the porn stores is rather interesting. There are two kinds that predominate. One is, of course, seductions of men by authority figures--governnenses, nurses, mamas, all that kind. Another is of women by male authority figures--doctors, professors, milkmen, whatever. What does it mean if some of this stuff turns women on? If you're the little girl in the doctor's office, vulnerable, coming in for help, totally exploited in the situation--a very common formula to have doctors with young women--does it mean if those things turn you on that we have been so brutalized by the dominance-submission pattern, a male pattern we've been acculturated to, that no other patterns are available to us to develop our own eroticism?

All of us have grown up in a culture where these are the kinds of images we've been fed, and that's what we respond to because it's all that we know. Sexuality is all in our heads, all of it. I've only been a lesbian for about two years. For the first year that I was a lesbian I was still attracted to men. It was a real process of rethinking until I got to the point where I was turned on by women, despite the fact that I had been sleeping with one for a year. So I think that this is something that we're all acculturated into. Women certainly do respond to the kind of images that you see in pornography. It takes time and effort for us to get to where we can say, "Well, yes, I realize that that's where that's coming from." And that we can make something better, we really can make something better and get rid of that other stuff.

Can we invent new sexual material for our children?

Sexuality is all in our heads, but we get it in our heads from a number of places. And getting it from male pornography might be one place, or male movies. But there are other places where we might get it from. For me--my own sense about why I enjoy the submission part of dominance and submission--I enjoy both roles a great deal--is very much tied with acculturation. It has to do with the fact that I grew up in a situation in which sexuality was repressed. To be forced to be in touch with my sexuality is something that is very exciting to me. It comes right out of the Victorian era, and I relate a great deal to this idea of me being forced. There are other ways that I could get there; I could simply do a lot of therapy and work on my sexual fantasies. I think it's important to at least acknowledge the possibility of our sexuality having been formed by something other than the male tradition, because it's important not to simply throw it all out.

Don't you think that the male tradition, though, is very much backed up in what you experienced in your family and what I experienced in my family?

Absolutely. There are ways in which I would want to throw out male domination of women, and that's the male pornography part. I might not want to throw out my being urged by another woman to get in touch with my own sexuality, to work past some of my oppressions. So I don't want to throw it all out.

Being turned on by dominance-submission patterns--maybe it doesn't need to be such a horrible thing. A filmmaker who has been much maligned this morning--Claudia Weill's--new film, IT'S MY TURN, has what I thought was rather a nice love scene between Jill Clayburgh and Michael Douglas in which the dominance-submission pattern very much changes; they change roles often in the process of this seduction. At first he is sort of in charge and then she is in charge, and then he is in charge and then she resents that and so she is going to be in charge. And the way that they finally go to bed--or that they begin to go to bed the first time--is that she begins to notice the scars on his body and asks him about these scars (he's a former athlete)

and seduces him into taking his shirt off. This is a reversal of the traditional. So maybe it is the case that dominance-submission patterns can be erotica, that kind of ability to be flexible within the roles and to switch off.

Possibly power doesn't have anything to do with it. Do we really want to talk about using power in sexuality differently? Redefining means to create another world. Is there any possibility even to begin to think about lack of power?

Power is very connected up with sexuality. Would it or wouldn't it be so in another world? It's a question of where you start. I'm in this world and can't walk out of here, pretend I was brought up in another world, and start something new. A comment was brought up yesterday to that effect: "Let's bring our genitalia in line with our politics." I heard that as if the woman were saying, what we need to do is start anew with these new politics and our genitalia would fall into line. We have been involved with power as a part of our sexuality. I'd rather play with that and liberate myself from it by switching off roles around that and not feeling always like I have to be the victim, which is, of course, what all of us have been brought up to be. One way towards liberation is very explicitly in sex to play with power. The other way I feel toward liberation is like that idea of having a place where you can go and come. I don't exactly want another place where I can go and come, but one thing that disturbs me a lot about the way that we as women and we as lesbians often talk about sexuality is we don't want to talk about genital sexuality, we want to talk about sensuality. That's lovely. There are films you can see about lesbian sexuality that have to do with flowers and daisies.

I want to reiterate that there is a difference between our lives and representation. It's a good thing to explore how representation works as a cultural artifact rather than quickly collapse the distinction between our lives and representation. There's a lot to be said about that relation, but we have to be careful in the ways we make those connections. The paradigm of sexuality that's set up is basically a genital one. No matter how you've tended to deploy yourself around that issue, there are other areas to be developed that have nothing to do with an iconography of flowers.

About representation of real life, WAV does collapse those two and says representations are so awful and destructive to our lives. It's not clear to me what that destructive pornographic representation is. But it is connected with sexual fantasies. If you need sexual fantasies to get gratified and have orgasm, in a certain sense you are dealing with representation. You have to construct pictures in your head; it's almost like watching movies, including the whole voyeuristic thing. I don't know enough about other people's sexuality because it's so hard to talk about fantasy. How far is that phenomenon pervasive? How many people use sexual fantasies in coming to orgasm? I don't know whether that's a particular thing from my Victorian household, or whether a lot of sexuality isn't just in your head. Using sexuality is a great deal in the head.

I want to give information more relevant to the kinds of discussions we usually have about pornography and violence, something that has made a great difference as I have come to take my position. One of the most difficult things that the women who are raped often have to do is tell the rapist how good it is and how much they're enjoying it. And that is the most horrible thing that they feel they have to do or be killed. One of the things that we know from research on pornography that is very consistent is that porn shows much rape which the women "enjoys." I'm not saying that men wouldn't rape without reading/seeing porn, but it does reinforce one of the worst parts of the whole problem of violence against women. We should be aware of this.